ARIZONA STATE VETERINARY MEDICAL EXAMINING BOARD
1740 W. ADAMS ST., SUITE 4600, PHOENIX, ARIZONA 85007
PHONE (602) 364-1PET (1738) FAX (602) 364-1039
VETBOARD.AZ.GOV

COMPLAINT INVESTIGATION FORM

If there is an issue with more than one veterinarian please file a separate Complaint Investigation Form for each veterinarian

PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

Date Received: March 1, 2018 Case Number: 18-85

A. THIS COMPLAINT IS FILED AGAINST THE FOLLOWING:

Name of Veterinarian/CVT: Stephanie Lamb license #6493

Premise Name: Arizona Exotic Animal Hospital

Premise Address: 744 N. Center St #101

City: Mesa State: AZ Zip Code: 85201

Telephone: (480) 275-7017

B. INFORMATION REGARDING THE INDIVIDUAL FILING COMPLAINT*:

Name: Maria G Swan

Address: [redacted]

City: [redacted] State: [redacted] Zip Code: [redacted]

Home Telephone: [redacted] Cell Telephone: [redacted]

**STATE LAW REQUIRES WE HAVE TO DISCLOSE YOUR NAME UNLESS WE CAN SHOW THAT DISCLOSURE WILL RESULT IN SUBSTANTIAL HARM TO YOU, SOMEONE ELSE OR THE PUBLIC PER A.R.S. § 41-1010. IF YOU HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE THAT SUBSTANTIAL HARM WILL RESULT IN DISCLOSURE OF YOUR NAME PLEASE PROVIDE COPIES OF RESTRAINING ORDERS OR OTHER DOCUMENTATION.*

RECEIVED
MAR 01 2018
BY:

C. PATIENT INFORMATION (1):

Name: Girl (Swan)

Breed/Species: Ferret

Age: 7years+ Sex: Female Color: White/non albino

PATIENT INFORMATION (2):

Name: _____

Breed/Species: _____

Age: _____ Sex: _____ Color: _____

D. VETERINARIANS WHO HAVE PROVIDED CARE TO THIS PET FOR THIS ISSUE:

Please provide the name, address and phone number for each veterinarian.

Heather Bjornebo (same facility) is-was the regular vet for about the last 2 years. She was not present when this issue occured. Dr Jay Johnson, owner of the facility was the last to see Girl prior to this issue.
Dr Stephanie Lamb was the veterinary in charge at the facility on February 17, day of Girl's death

E. WITNESS INFORMATION:

Please provide the name, address and phone number of each witness that has direct knowledge regarding this case.

Along with Dr. Lamb, 2 staff members were present providing service. Sarah, the front desk receptionist whom I trusted because she owns ferrets. And a vet tec who usually assists Dr Bjornebo and who I tend to call Kevin but his name is Justin. I was alone.

Attestation of Person Requesting Investigation

By signing this form, I declare that the information contained herein is true and accurate to the best of my knowledge. Further, I authorize the release of any and all medical records or information necessary to complete the investigation of this case.

Signature: Mana J Swan

Date: February 26-2018

F. ALLEGATIONS and/or CONCERNS:

Please provide all information that you feel is relevant to the complaint. This portion must be either typewritten or clearly printed in ink.

On 2/12/2018 I brought in my ferret, concerned that she appeared to be in pain. On this Monday Dr. Jay Johnson was there, whom I met for the first time. I found him very knowledgeable and compassionate. He pointed out the ferret's advanced age and found she had a problem (causing pain) with her knee and hip. I asked him to walk me through the Euthanasia process. He explained about the initial sedation and then what he termed substantially an overdose by injection. I made a follow up appointment .March 6th, the first available. I gave Girl her med as instructed, but with little improvement. Nights were very bad, her pain obvious. 2/16,2018 was a particularly bad night. I could hear this creature moaning from a another room. In the morning I called Arizona Exotic Animal Hospital and made an appointment to take her in to end her suffering. Sarah answered the phone and set up the appointment. Dr Lamb was there. Sarah assured me she was a compassionate vet. I read and signed the paperwork about Sedation then Euthanasia. Spoke to Dr Lamb whom I vaguely remember. She told me first they would sedate Girl, then a small syringe would help go peacefully because by the time the (#2) injection happened the ferret's heart would stop before the syringe was empty. I sat in the room and waited, Girl slept in the carryon. Dr Lamb came back with a huge (lengthwise) syringe filled with pink liquid. I asked if I may hold my ferret while sedation was injected. Dr. Lamb said she's prefer that the male tec (Justin) held Girl. I don't remember if Sarah was in the room then, but I do remember my horror when they picked up the little tiny ferret and plunged the syringe into her upper back, I got quickly out of my chair, stunned, horrified watching this tiny voiceless creature trash and writhe in agony. I tried to say something, was told it's okay it's just sedative, see? She's calming down. Indeed in minutes the convulsing stopped and suddenly all her body fluids ejected simultaneously. AND I APOLOGIZED. Sarah wiped Girls' butt and then they handed me the 'sedated ferret'.

I sat in a state of disbelief, holding the lifeless body. They left the room and I searched for her breath, there was none. I searched for an eye movement,none. Her eyelids won't close, but nothing moved. In desperation I put my ear against her chest and while she wasn't breathing, I could hear a soft, intermittent hiccup like coming from her heart. All I could think was that they pierced her heart. WHY? Minutes later Dr.Lamb returned with the male Tech, she had a rather small syringe, I tend to think it was light blue, but it could have been clear, by then I could hardly breathe. Dr Lamb declared that Justin will help her inject the final liquid in my ferret leg. And as promised, she announced that Girl was dead before the small syringe emptied. A few minutes later she folded the towel over my ferret and carried the body away. I walked out of the room, to my car and came home. On Sunday, I called the hospital, a young woman (Roxanne?) answered, I asked to speak to Dr Johnson. Was made aware that would not be possible. I asked to speak to the office manager. Was told he would call me first thing Monday. He didn't. I called. Sarah took the call. The Sarah I so trusted. Dr Bjornebo called me and when I told her what happened she said that wasn't possible, I was mistaken. She also added that even if Dr Lamb had been so inclined, her staff, especially Sarah would never let that happen. She asked me the color of the liquid on the first, large syringe, she asked me about the needle. The needle had a cap on I couldn't see but the liquid was pink. After I said PINK there was a silence. The kind of silence that speaks. And from then on everything changed. Dr Bjornebo went into damage control mode.

I am not searching financial compensation

Cannot change what has been done to that small creature. The terror and suffering she must have felt in those last moments. Dr Stephanie Lamb took an oath. The way the killing of the ferret went on, it wasn't their first time. Perfect coordination, smooth operation, and if this can take place in front of unsuspecting, loving pet owners, what happens behind closed doors?

All I ask is that someone makes sure no other animal dies this way. Such cowardly, heartless human has no right to be a Doctor.

I also request a fifteen minutes meeting with Dr Jay Johnson.

Thank you

18-85

Dear Arizona State Veterinary Medical Examining Board,

I am writing this letter in reference to the complaint filed against me from Mrs. Maria G Swan regarding the euthanasia of her ferret, Girl. The reference number for this case is 18-85. I have read through her account of the incident and have provided a narrative from my position below.

On Saturday February 17, 2018, Maria Swan called our office to schedule an appointment for her pet to be euthanized. The receptionist, Sarah Moyer, had scheduled the appointment and I was made aware of it. I had been informed by Sarah and one of the veterinary assistants, Somer Gaytan Shope, that this owner had already wanted to euthanize the ferret on multiple occasions but this time she was sure that it was time. She had been seen by one of our other doctors, Dr. Jay Johnson, just a few days prior and was not improving with the NSAID therapy that had been started to help with her arthritis and the owner was afraid she was suffering. Once the owner arrived, she was placed into our second examination room for privacy and was given the paperwork to sign indicating she was going to be euthanizing her ferret. Once the owner signed this paperwork and paid for the euthanasia, I was alerted that she and the ferret were in the office and they were waiting in the exam room for me. When I entered the exam room, I said hello to the owner and asked if she thought it was time for her ferret to be put to sleep. The owner stated that she felt it was time and that her ferret was mostly laying around. As I was beginning to tell her about the steps of the euthanasia procedure, one of our technicians (Sarah) was walking back into the room with the receipt for payment and the owners credit card. I informed the owner of the procedure and that I would sedate the ferret heavily first so that she would be asleep. Once she was asleep, I would come back to give the IV administration of euthasol. I informed her that, after administration of the euthasol, there was the potential for agonal breathing or movements. I told her that once I was done injecting I would listen to the ferret and let her know when she had passed. I had the sedatives in my hand which consisted of ketamine, midazolam and butorphanol in a single 1 ml syringe with a 26 G needle attached. I asked if she wanted to hold the ferret. The owner said she either could or could not hold her and I could do whatever I felt was better. I told her that I would hold the ferret for the injection and then hand the ferret to her once I was done. Kneeling on the ground, I reached into the carrier to get the ferret. I propped the patient onto my lap and I tented the fur up between her shoulder blades. I injected the needle into the subcutaneous space and when I did this the ferret squirmed. Sarah noticed the ferret had struggled and them came to help me. I finished the injection and at the end the patient urinated and defecated on me. I stood up and Sarah helped to clean the fecal material off of the ferret before I went to hand the patient back to the owner. The owner said I could place her in the carrier so I did. The owner said sorry for the ferret pooping on me and walked over to the carrier. I told her it was fine and to not worry as that happens sometimes with ferrets whenever we do something to them. I informed the owner that I would let her sit with the ferret for 5-10 minutes and let her get sleepy and then return to administer the final injection of euthasol. The owner said ok. After approximately 10 minutes I came back into the room and asked if the owner was ok with me coming in to administer the euthasol. I do not think she answered verbally but she did nod her head in acceptance. I approached the table and the ferret was sleeping and breathing slowly. I had brought another technician, Justin Duering, into the room with me to have him hold off a vein. He held off the cephalic vein and I administered the euthasol solution. At the end of the injection, I listened for a heartbeat; there was none. I informed the owner that she had passed. The owner quietly petted her ferret and then allowed us to take her from the room. The owner elected to have a paw print made and individual cremation for Girl.

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BY:

I did not hear anything else from the owner about this incident. I was made aware the next day that the owner had called to complain and was speaking to Dr.Heather Bjornebo about the incident.

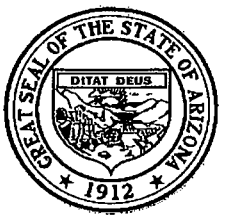
It is my position that I humanely euthanized the ferret as the owner requested in a manner that is considered acceptable by AVMA guidelines. Unfortunately, the ferret did wiggle with the first subcutaneous injection and eliminated her bowels but this is something that happens occasionally when ferrets are given injections or experience other unpleasant stimuli, such as getting their temperature taken. The injection was administered solely within the subcutaneous space between the shoulders.

Thank you for reading and considering my position on this case. Please don't hesitate to let me know if there is anything else with which I may be of service.

Sincerely,

Dr. Stephanie Lamb

DOUGLAS A. DUCEY
- GOVERNOR -



VICTORIA WHITMORE
- EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR -

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INVESTIGATIVE COMMITTEE REPORT

TO: Arizona Veterinary Medical Examining Board

FROM: PM Investigative Committee: Donald Noah, D.V.M. - Chair
Amrit Rai, D.V.M.
Adam Almaraz
Christine Butkiewicz, D.V.M.
William Hamilton

STAFF PRESENT: Tracy A. Riendeau, CVT – Investigations
Sunita Krishna, Assistant Attorney General

RE: Case: 18-85
Complainant(s): Maria G. Swan
Respondent(s): Stephanie Lamb, DVM (License: 6493)

SUMMARY:
Complaint Received at Board Office: 3/1/18
Committee Discussion: 7/10/18
Board IIR: 8/15/18

APPLICABLE STATUTES AND RULES:
Laws as Amended July 2014 (Salmon); Rules as Revised September 2013 (Yellow)

On February 17, 2018, "Girl," a 7+-year-old female ferret was presented to Respondent to be euthanized. The ferret was sedated and then Respondent administered the euthanasia solution.

Complainant contends Respondent was negligent in the care of the ferret.

Complainant was noticed and appeared.
Respondent was noticed and appeared.

The Committee reviewed medical records, testimony, and other documentation as described below:

- Complainant(s) narrative: *Maria G. Swan*
- Respondent(s) narrative/medical record: *Stephanie Lamb, DVM*
- Witness(es) narrative: *Arizona Exotic Animal Hospital Staff*

PROPOSED 'FINDINGS of FACT':

1. On February 17, 2018, Complainant presented the ferret to Respondent for euthanasia. Complainant reported the ferret was not improving on the NSAID therapy her associate, Dr. Johnson, had prescribed for arthritis and she felt the ferret was suffering.

2. Complainant stated that she had been considering euthanizing the ferret due to pain from her hip and knee. Dr. Johnson at a previous appointment explained the euthanasia process to Complainant – the ferret would first be sedated then an injection of euthanasia would be administered which was essentially an overdose of an anesthetic.

3. According to Complainant, Respondent entered the exam room with a large (lengthwise) syringe filled with a pink substance. An assistant held the ferret for Respondent while she injected the substance into the ferret's upper back. The ferret squirmed and urinated and defecated on Respondent. Staff cleaned up the ferret and handed her to Complainant. Complainant stated that she held the ferret; she could not hear her heart or see her breathing therefore she believed Respondent pierced the ferret's heart with the syringe that supposedly contained the sedative.

4. Complainant continued that a few minutes later, Respondent returned with a smaller syringe containing a blue or clear substance. A staff member assisted Respondent as she injected the fluid into the ferret's leg – Respondent announced that the ferret had passed.

5. According to Respondent, once the paperwork was signed and euthanasia was paid for, she entered the room, introduced herself and discussed if Complainant felt it was time to put the ferret to sleep. Complainant stated it was. Respondent explained that she would heavily sedate the ferret first so she would be asleep. Once asleep, Respondent would return to the room to give the IV administration of euthasol. After administering the euthasol, there was the potential for agonal breathing or movements. After Respondent was finished injecting the euthasol, she would listen to the ferret and let Complainant know when she had passed.

6. Respondent had the sedative with her that consisted of ketamine, midazolam and butorphanol in a single 1mL syringe with a 26 guage needle attached. She asked Complainant if she would like to hold the ferret – Complainant deferred to what Respondent felt was best therefore Respondent held the ferret while administering the sedation. Respondent knelt on the ground, reached into the carrier to get the ferret, placed the ferret onto her lap, tented the fur between the shoulder blades and injected the needle into the SQ space. The ferret squirmed and Complainant came to help Respondent. Respondent finished the injection and at the end, the ferret urinated and defecated on her. Respondent stood up and staff cleaned up the ferret before Respondent handed the ferret to Complainant. Complainant asked Respondent to place the ferret back into the carrier, which she did. Respondent advised Complainant that she would return in approximately 5 – 10 minutes and administer the euthasol once the ferret was asleep.

7. After 10 minutes, Respondent returned to the exam room and asked Complainant if it was ok to come in and administered the euthasol. Complainant did not verbally answer but nodded her head in acceptance. Respondent approached the table where the ferret was sleeping and breathing slowly. Technical staff held off a cephalic vein and Respondent administered the

euthanasia solution. Respondent listened for a heartbeat, there was none, and she informed Complainant that the ferret had passed. Complainant quietly petted the ferret and then allowed them to take the ferret from the room. A paw print was made and owner elected individual cremation for the ferret.

8. Respondent stated that she humanely euthanized the ferret as Complainant requested. Unfortunately, the ferret squirmed with the first SQ injection and eliminated her bowels but this is something that happens occasionally when ferrets are given injections or experience other unpleasant stimuli. The injection was administered solely within the SQ space between the shoulder blades.

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION:

The Committee discussed that it is always an emotional situation when euthanizing a pet. It is especially difficult if someone has not experienced the procedure in the past and things do not go as smoothly as expected. An animal can vocalize or squirm which can be troubling if it is expected to be a peaceful event, without complication.

The Committee discussed that it would be helpful if the veterinarian or staff would explain to a pet owner the potential normal side effects that could occur due to injections or handling of an animal, such as ferrets, like defecating and/or urinating.

COMMITTEE'S PROPOSED CONCLUSIONS of LAW:

The Committee concluded that no violations of the *Veterinary Practice Act* occurred.

COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDED DISPOSITION:

Motion: It was moved and seconded the Board:

Dismiss this issue with no violation.

Vote: The motion was approved with a vote of 5 to 0.

The information contained in this report was obtained from the case file, which includes the complaint, the respondent's response, any consulting veterinarian or witness input, and any other sources used to gather information for the investigation.

Tracy A. Riendeau, CVT
Investigative Division